
Committee on Governmental Rules & Regulations
(Public Responsibility Council)
Interim Project

Developing Customer Service Policy



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DEVELOPING CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

- I. **Identify current practices or examples of Best Practices programs that address the issue of improving customer service.** *Investigate and research current customer service policies of two Florida agencies.* What state agencies in Florida have already implemented such a standard as part of agency policy? Is such a standard found in rule, in official agency policy, in a code or a pledge? Are such policies effective? What data are available supporting such policies? What are some other states that are implementing such policies? Is the Federal government implementing policies parallel to policies suggested by the proposed legislation? What is the private sector doing?
- II. **Meet with agency staff.** What type of feedback does the agency receive from its customers? What are some expressed areas in need of improvement? How does the agency currently operate? What recommendations are feasible? Is the agency culture willing to encourage change? Are there institutional obstacles that need to be rectified prior to the implementation of customer service standards?
- III. **Develop customer service standards.** Delivering great service means that government takes every opportunity to ensure that the customer does not have to make multiple calls, visit numerous agencies or departments, wait an extensive period of time for an agency response, or explain his or her problem to more than one person.

Critical to delivering great service is knowing how the organization determines emerging customer requirements and expectations. In a rapidly changing environment, many factors usually affect customer preference and loyalty. Therefore, it is necessary for an agency to listen and learn on a continuous basis, but most importantly, it is essential for an agency to have a close connection with the organization's overall mission and goals. The following are some recommendations for improved customer service:

- (1) ***Identify customers served by the agency.***
In identifying customers, an agency should evaluate its mission and goals. What was the original purpose of the agency? Who was the agency trying to assist, to help? An agency must know its client base.
- (2) ***Surveys can gauge customers' needs, current sentiments and level of satisfaction with existing services.***
 - ☐ Identify drivers of satisfaction: What makes a customer a satisfied customer? What needs must be met to maintain satisfaction? In surveys implemented to identify drivers of satisfaction, the following needs were surfaced by customers: Need for accuracy, need for timeliness, and a need for responsiveness.
 - ☐ In addition to surveys, an agency could opt to conduct some alternative research strategies such as focus groups and customer feedback systems. This method of feedback measures from a customer's perspective. It measures value to operations and outcomes. Some other methods for measuring customer satisfaction are from an internal perspective (process performance) and an external perspective (bench marking).

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IV. *Set Customer Service Standards:* Once agencies have identified what it takes to satisfy customers, it is good business practice to make pledged expectations. In conjunction to setting standards for customers, an agency or department should also implement standards for employees. It is important to make clear what the agency's goals are and how the employee participates in upholding adopted customer service standards. Essential to good customer service is making information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible. How the agency provides access and information to enable customers to seek assistance, to conduct business, and to voice complaints is critical to formulating an effective customer service standard. In general, the department should at least provide the following:

- ☐ Provide customers with toll-free numbers.
- ☐ Provide customers and employees with Internet access. Also include Web sites and e-mail addresses.
- ☐ Centralize agency functions.
- ☐ Provide customers with informational materials such as pamphlets and brochures.
- ☐ Improve phone systems. Offer customers a menu to choose from, always offering the option to reach a customer service representative immediately. Getting caught in a phone maze is frustrating to customers.

Customer service characteristics-- no matter how basic or complex-- should always address responsiveness, professionalism, accuracy, timeliness, problem resolution, and efforts to improve. The following are specific customer service standards that may be considered:

1. *Standards for general information inquiries and contacts...*
 - ☐ Written inquiries and e-mail shall be answered within a specified number of working days.
 - ☐ Telephone calls to the department shall be answered by knowledgeable persons who answer questions or refer questions promptly. The customer shall receive no more than two referrals.
 - ☐ Departments with voice mail options shall include an option for customers to contact a live attendant.
 - ☐ Customers meeting with department staff shall not be kept waiting.
2. *Standards for publication or document requests...*
 - ☐ Requests for single copies of publications by telephone will be sent within 48 hours.
 - ☐ Requests for single copies by mail and all bulk orders will be filled within three working days.
 - ☐ Publications and documents will be made available in alternative formats on request.
 - ☐ The option to receive information in electronic form where possible shall be made available.

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3. *Standards for complaints...*
- ☐ Written complaints will be responded to within a specified number of working days.
 - ☐ Complaints received by telephone shall be referred to the proper source and advised of grievance process.
 - ☐ A mediation panel or complaint committee shall review all customer complaints and respond appropriately. If mediation is necessary, then the panel/committee shall initiate such proceedings.

Develop a grievance process for customers. Customers should know that their feedback is essential to the agency's improvement. The agency must create forms, provide telephone numbers and other information to facilitate a grievance initiative on behalf of the customer. In addition, the agency must acknowledge and respond to each grievance including in the correspondence the agency's action in response to the customer's complaint. The data collected from customer grievances and complaints should be used to support the identification of key customer requirements.